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AUTHOR Dobson, Russell; Brewer, Leon
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ABSTRACT

Compared were attitudes of elementary school teachers and principals on their classification of student behavior and discipline problems and behavior change treatment needed. Subjects consisted of 170 elementary school teachers and 15 principals in a mid-western city school system. Reaction of teachers and principals to discipline and behavior problems and their suggested treatment were rated on the Behavioral Problems Inventory and the Behavioral Problems Treatment Sheet (Dobson, 1966). The statistical method utilized in testing the hypotheses was chi-square, with the level of confidence set at .05. The findings considered to be most significant were that elementary school principals differed significantly from elementary school teachers in their perception of the seriousness of behavioral problems of elementary school children, with principals perceiving the acts as less serious than the teachers, that significant differences in attitudes toward treatment of behavioral problems existed between principals and teachers, and that principals and teachers were in agreement on the value of parent teacher conferences as an effective method of treating behavior, with the principals also favoring parent child teacher conferences. (CB)

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# THE PERCEPTION AND TREATMENT BY TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS OF THE BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

Russell Dobson and Leon Brewer

When does an act performed by a student become a behavioral problem? Wickman (1932, p. 3) stated:

> It is noted that the very existence of a behavior problem is designated by personal or social attitude. There can be no problem in behavior, in the active social sense, unless someone reacts to them as such. Moreover, any form of conduct in child or adult may become a problem if it is regarded and treated as undesirable behavior by the social group in which the individual happens to live.

Educators have been concerned with the behavior of school children for many years, but the literature reveals no single criterion that can be used to mark the borderline between acceptable behavior and misbehavior. A difference of opinion exists among elementary school educators concerning what constitutes misbahavior of pupils in the elementary school and the type of treatment which should be prescribed. Today behavior problems of elementary school children are a subject of increasing interest and concern. Success and failure of elementary school teachers and elementary school principals are frequently reported in terms of pupil control. The maintenance of order and discipline in the classroom is rated at the top of the list of problems teachers consider to be their major difficulties (Nelson, 1963).

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Kaplan (1963) noted that 50 percent of the annoyances of teachers in the elementary school environment, are related to the behavior of children. The patterns of behavior of children which distress teachers most of the time were those which challenged or threatened the role of the teacher or which violated the teacher's personal standards. Two-thirds or more of the teachers involved in the study were concerned or annoyed by incomplete work. Other annoyances were lying, stealing, and cheating - in order of importance.

McDonnel (1963) supported Kaplan's findings when he discovered that four types of annoying behavior accounted for 57 per cent of the items indicated by teachers as being sources of annoynace. These four types of annoying behavior reported by McDonnell were (1) talking, (2) lack of attention, (3) tattling or disturbing others, and (4) seeking teachers attention or recognition.

Amidon and Miller's (1965) findings show that superior teachers dominated their classrooms less, used indirect verbal behavior more, and used direction-giving and criticism less than the normative group of teachers. The superior teachers were more accepting of pupil inititated ideas, tended to encourage these ideas more, and made a greater effort to build on these ideas than did the average teacher.

Del Popolo (1960) found a significant relationship existing between an individual's personality structure and his opinions and attitudes toward pupil-teacher relationships and his observable behavioral traits in a classroom setting. Authoritarian teachers tended to get significantly lower scores than did equalitarian teachers on an inventory of attitudes and opinions about pupil-teacher relationships.

Attitudes provide elementary school teachers and principals with ready-made frames of reference, by which they can judge behaviors. Attitudes are major determinants of perception of complex behaviors subject to amibiguous interpretations. A review of educational literature indicates a growing awareness by educators of the significance of elementary school teachers' attitudes toward the behavior of elementary school children.

Research indicates that the elementary school teacher and elementary school principal of today seem to be highly professional and cosmopolitan and to possess desirable social perceptions. Although modern elementary school teachers and principals may be better prepared to cope with the behavioral problems of elementary school children than their counterpart

of a decade ago, the intensity and complexity of the problems which elementary school age children encounter have increased. In light of these presuppositions as investigation of this nature seemed to have merit.

Hypotheses

The central problem of this study was to determine whether teachers and principals working in elementary schools differ significantly in their perception of disciplinary problems and their proposed treatment of children who exihibit such problems.

Specifically, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. Do elementary school teachers and elementary school principals differ in their perception of misbehavior on the part of elemntary school pupils?
2. Are elementary school principals and elementary school teachers in agreement concerning treatment for children who exhibit deviate behavior?

Instrumentation

In order to answer the foregoing questions, it was necessary to measure the attitudes and practices of a reasonable number of elementary school teachers and principals toward behavioral problems of their pupils. The selected insturment utilized was the Behavioral Problems Inventory and the Behavioral Problems Treatment Sheet (Dobson, 1966). This instrument was based upon studies reported by Wickman (1929) and others who compiled and validated lists of acts of children perceived by teachers as misbehavior. Two lines of inquiry were pursued to obtain evidence of teacher and principal perception and proposed treatment of behavioral problems of the elementary school children involved in the study. First, the reactions of teachers and principals to specific types of behavioral problems were measured by eliciting their judgements about the seriousness of the prob-

lems listed on the Behavioral Problems Inventory. The response categories were scored high, medium, or low. Second, the participating teachers' and principals' attitudes toward treatment of these behavioral problems were ascertained by analyzing the Behavioral Treatment Response Sheet. The participants were asked to make their ratings as quickly as possible. It was hoped that an instant response would reflect how they actually perceived behavior. It was felt that if the participants took time to study each item they might answer in a way that would indicate how they thought their attitudes ought to be instead of how they acutally perceived the behavior act.

Sample

The participants in this study included all (170) elementary school teachers and principals (15) in a mid-western city school system. No attempt was made to control for sex, years of experience differential, level of educational attainment, or geographic location. The attitudes of the participants may or may not be representative of attitudes of teachers and principals teaching in other communities.

Results

The statistical method utilized in testing the major hypotheses was chi-square. The level of confidence was set at .05 level. In all cases 5.99 represented a significant score.

The data in Table 1 demonstrates the items from the Behavioral Problems Inventory for which nonsignificant scores were obtained. Table 1 further demonstrates that for 35 of the 41 acts listed on the Behavioral Problems Inventory there was a nonsignificant difference between the two groups.

TABLE 1.--Items from the Behavioral Problems Inventory which showed nonsignificant differences in perception of the seriousness of behavioral acts between teachers and principals.

| Behavioral Act | $X^2$ | Behavioral Act | $X^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|
| General Rudeness | 4.50 | Lying, untruthfulness | 4.13 |
| Cheating on class assignments &/or tests | .89 | Masturbation | .76 |
| Defacing school property &/or equipment | 2.96 | Smoking | 3.93 |
| Habitual tardiness | 1.15 | Restlessness | .71 |
| Committing petty theivery | .90 | Disorderliness in classroom | 3.20 |
| Whispering, writing notes | 3.59 | Daydreaming | 2.90 |
| Interrupting | 5.48 | Slovenly appearance | .69 |
| Physical laziness | .24 | Sissy or tomboy | 2.33 |
| Willful disobedience | .17 | No interest in classwork | .48 |
| Cruelty, bullying | .33 | Sex offense | 2.26 |
| Quarrelsomeness | 1.90 | Eating candy, etc., in school | .34 |
| Tattling on others | 4.92 | Horseplay | .59 |
| Stubborness, contrariness | 1.77 | Physical attact on teacher | 4.05 |
| Rages, Temper tantrums | 3.10 | Domineering, overbearing | .61 |
| Rudeness, impudence to teachers | 2.34 | Overcritical of others | 1.07 |
| Shyness, timidity, withdrawing | 2.59 | Irresponsible | 4.60 |
| Acting smart | .50 | Physical coward | 2.76 |
| Unhappiness, depression | 3.81 | | |

Nonsignificant at the .05 level of confidence

Significant results obtained by applying the Chi-square test to responses given by teachers and principals on the Behavioral Problems Inventory are shown in Table 2. Table 2 shows us that on 6 of the 41 acts listed on the Behavioral Problems Inventory there was a significant difference in perception between the two groups.

TABLE 2.--Items from the Behavioral Problems Inventory which showed significant differences in perception of the seriousness of behavioral acts between the teachers and principals.

| Behavioral Act | $X^2$ | Behavioral Act | $X^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Running in the hall | 6.46 | Obscene notes, talk | 8.28 |
| Truancy | 7.06 | Failure to pay attention | 16.85 |
| Swearing, using profane language | 7.59 | Carelessness, inaccuracy in work | 7.39 |

Significant at the .05 level of confidence

Of the six acts for which significant differences occured, teachers felt that the problem of running in the halls were more serious than did principals. The data indicated that the principals perceived truancy to be a greater problem than did teachers. Principals felt the problem of swearing to be of greater significance than did the teachers. Teachers felt the problem of obscene notes and talk was of a more serious nature than did the principals. Teachers considered failure to pay attention to be more serious a problem than did principals. And finally, teachers perceived carelessness, inaccuracy in work to be a more serious problem than did the principals.

Total responses from the Behavioral Problems Inventory were tabulated and a chi square test applied to determine if an overall significant difference existed between teachers and principals concerning the perception of behavioral problems. The results are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3.--Total responses on the Behavioral Problems Inventory which reflect a difference in perception of the seriousness of behavioral problems between principals and teachers.

| Degree of Seriousness | Principals | Teachers |
|---|---|---|
| High | 156 | 1950 |
| Medium | 228 | 1818 |
| Low | 272 | 2340 |
| | | $X^2$ 9.04 |

Table 3 demonstrates that there is a significant difference between the principals and teachers as to their perception of what constitutes a behavioral problem.

As stated earlier, there were only six behavioral problems which showed a significant score when the Chi Square Test was applied. According to the raw data, the remaining 35 which did not show significant results, the principals perceived twelve of these to be more serious than did the teachers. They were: habitual tardiness; committing petty theivery disorderliness in classroom; quarrelsomeness, stubborness, contrariness; rages, temper tantrums; rudeness, impudence to teachers; shyness, timidity, withdrawing; unhappiness, depression; no interest in classwork; physical attack on teacher: and overcritical of others.

According to the raw data, the teachers perceived 23 items to be more serious than did the principals. They were: general rudeness; cheating on class assignments &/Or equipment; lying, untruthfulness; masturbation; smoking; restlessness; whispering, writing notes; interrupting; physical laziness; willful disobedience; cruetly, bullying; tattling on others; acting smart; daydreaming; slovenly appearance; sissy or tomboy; sex offense; eating candy, etc., in school; horseplay; domineering, overbearing; irresponsible; physical coward.

The Behavioral Treatment Response Sheet was administered to all participants in the study with specific instructions to recommend treatment for the behavioral acts listed on the sheet. Table 4 shows the total number of responses by each of the two designated groups for the twenty-three treatments included on the Behavioral Treatment Response Sheet.

TABLE 4.--Total responses by principals and teachers for the treatments listed on the Behavioral Treatment Response Sheet.

| Treatment | Principals | Teachers |
|---|---|---|
| Desirable Treatment: (Humanistic) | | |
| Give pupil opportunity to make Contribution to class | 4 | 392 |
| Teacher used simple control (a look, a nod of head, etc.) | 14 | 456 |
| Parent-teacher conference | 98 | 960 |
| Pupil-teacher conference | 224 | 2226 |
| Pupil loses some privilege | 18 | 414 |
| Pupil referred to special service personnel | 116 | 534 |
| Role Playing | 16 | 180 |
| Isolate the Pupil | 4 | 164 |
| Emphasize good qualities of child's behavior | 36 | 368 |
| Assess and imporve through group discussion | 54 | 750 |
| Ignore the behavior | 2 | 218 |
| N | 730 | 7316 |
| Undesirable Treatment: (Primitive) | | |
| Pupil apologizes | 10 | 252 |
| Teacher lowers grade | 0 | 72 |
| Detention after school | 10 | 172 |
| Pupil temporarily suspended from school | 2 | 64 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Pupil temporarily suspended from room | 4 | 50 |
| Corporal punishment is used | 0 | 56 |
| Send child to principal's office | 8 | 226 |
| Physical control of student | 4 | 104 |
| Require additional assignment | 0 | 116 |
| Some action by fellow student | 10 | 68 |
| Behavior called to attention of other class members | 8 | 72 |
| N | 56 | 1252 |

$X^2 = 27.31$

The level of significance for chi-square was set at the 0.05 level which required a value of equal to or greater than 3.84 for significance. The significant chi-square score of 27.31 was due to the teachers selecting undesirable treatments to such a high degree.

Table 4 reveals that the teachers very highly favored the use of the "parent-teacher conference." The principals, however, stated that the use of the "parent-teacher conference," along with the "pupil-teacher conference," would be more satisfactory. The principals used undesirable treatment 56 times. No one treatment received more than 10 tallies in the undesirable treatments selected by the principals. The teachers chose undesirable treatments 1252 times. Of these treatments, "pupil-apologies" was chosen 252 times. "Send pupil to principal's office" was chosen 226 times, and "detention after school" was chosen 172 times. Two other undesirable treatments, "require additional assignments," and "physical control of student," were checked by teachers more than 100 times each.

Findings

The findings of this study considered to be most significant were the following:

1. Elementary school principals differ significantly from elementary school teachers in their perception of the seriousness of behavioral problems of elementary school children. Elementary school principals perceived these acts as being less serious than did elementary school teachers.
2. Significant differences in attitudes toward treatment of behavioral problems exist between elementary school principals and elementary school teachers.
3. The elementary school principals and teachers were in agreement as to the value of the parent-teacher conference as a good method to treat behavior. The principals felt the child should be involved also. In most instances the principals checked both the parent-teacher conference and the pupil-teacher conference as the desirable treatments for particular behavior.

Discussion

Emphasis on the psychological and emotional growth of children has introduced new problems for elementary school educators. In the past, teachers, principals, and pupils were primarily concerned with intellectual activities. Today the elementary school educator has the responsibility of fostering the emotional, social, and ethical growth of children as well as promoting their intellectual growth. This modern approach to learning has made many demands on the elementary school educator as a person.

The statistical results of the data in this study revealed a significant difference, between teachers and principals, of the perception and treatment of behavioral problems of elementary school

children. These findings seem to create certain questions for the elementary school educator. Are elementary school teachers and principals sufficiently adequate themselves to accept the normal behavior of young children? What conditions exist in the principal-teacher-community relationship which tend to make the teachers' and principals' role easier or more difficult? Why did teachers and principals differ in their perception and treatment of behavioral problems of elementary school children? Does pre-service and in-service preparation of teachers and principals influence attitudes toward perception and treatment of behavioral problems of elementary school children? To what extent does diversification between teacher and principal preparation account for these differences in attitudes toward behavioral problems of elementary school children? To what degree do the institutional tasks of the two designated groups influence attitudes? Since the study revealed the elementary principal to be the more accepting and understanding of the two groups--does the principal have any direct influence on the modification of teacher attitude toward elementary school children's behavior? These are pertinent questions in elementary education and related disciplines. In terms of limitations of this study, it is important to recognize that certain selective factors may have been operating in the school system where this study was accomplished: therefore, future studies might utilize larger sample groups to reduce selective sampling bias.

The evidence revealed by the data in this study seems to indicate that elementary school teachers and principals must develop a wide variety of strategies for dealing with behavioral problems in desirable ways. Elementary school teachers and principals need to

exchange ideas and experiences in regard to the behaivoral problems of children. The differences in attitudes toward perception and treatment of behavioral problems of children between teachers and principals would indicate a lack of communication in this area. It would appear that these professional people have much to offer one another, and from their mutually increased knowledge would come to marked advances toward the goal of a complete understanding of the child.

In terms of limitations of this study, it is important to recognize that certain selective factors may have been operating in the school system where this study was accomplished; therefore, future studies might utilize larger sample groups to reduce selective sampling bias.

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